



World Conference on Psychology and Sociology 2012

The Dark Knight and the Ideology Behind

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Abstract

Entertainment itself is political because evaluating any kind of entertainment without considering the ideological context that it is created within can cause false interpretations. Cinema is the kind of entertainment that is the topic of this presentation. Briefly defined, cinema is the artistic enterprise that utilizes the moving images, it is a visual media that reflects reality, tells stories using realistic fiction or fantastic elements.

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Selection and peer review under the responsibility of Prof. Dr. Kobus Maree, University of Pretoria, South Africa.

Keywords: Batman, Ideology, Myth.

1. Introduction

We will be focusing on one director and screenplay/story writer Christopher Nolan who has directed popular films such as *The Prestige*, *Memento* and *Inception* and the focus of this presentation: *The Dark Knight Trilogy*. The main character, the Dark Knight of the movie is Batman, a superhero first introduced in Detective Comics' 27th volume on May 1923 by artist Bob Kane and writer Bill Finger (Fleisher, 1976). The reason we choose Batman and this trilogy is that since its first introduction to the comic book circle, it has been portrayed by different artists and the series and films of Batman are written and directed by many different writers and directors. Thus, the different interpretations reveal and portray the ideology behind Batman according to the creators' own perspectives and hidden elements in some of the films are visible in some others, which makes it relatively easy to point the stance of the creator(s) and analyze the movie(s).

All three Batman films of Nolan are of consideration for us but we will specifically be focusing on the last one, *The Dark Knight Rises*, as we believe that the last film summarizes well the ideology that Nolan is trying to support. Even though there are common elements in the trilogy, in our point of view, *The Dark Knight Rises* is the one where some messages are overtly emphasized. Four of the characters of the film are of grave importance for us. Bruce Wayne/ Batman, Bane, Alfred, and Miranda. These characters will be dealt with in more detail during the presentation.

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We will be analyzing the film on the axis of ideology, myth and the deferral of the meaning and will be dealing with the notions of crime, the good, the bad, and as a necessity of the era we are living in, we will be giving importance to the dominant political system and its presentation in the film with references to the opposing system(s).

2. Myth and ideology: The characters

Our approach to and definition of myth is based on the myth of Roland Barthes in his *Mythologies*. According to Barthes, myth can be the equivalent of ideology (Fiske & Hartley, 1978). In this aspect, when we say that the director tries to create a modern myth by his films, we point out the fact that he is supporting the contemporary ideology by composing a fictitious story, a fictitious geography and utilizing a superhero. Terry Eagleton defined ideology as the legitimization of dominant powers' values and beliefs as inevitable and universal. This way, the real social conflicts which are the source of ideology are hidden behind the imaginary resolutions (Eagleton, 1991).

If we also define myths traditionally, “they are religious or sacred folktales which explain the origins of the world, a people, a God or some social practice” (Bruce & Yearley, 2006, p. 205). As people know that what happens in myths is impossible, they do not take them at face-value. Myths can be utilized to study the values of people (Bruce & Yearley, 2006). When we talk about modern myths, we are again referring to some “tales” which explain the current situation of the globe, the conditions that created the situation, and its results. Hence, the traditional definition of myth can also be easily connected to ideology because the conditions that the humanity is living in are the direct results of the current ideology. Any kind of contemporary social practice as well can be explained by modern myths because what people do is what the ideology tells them to do, either implicitly or explicitly.

“Crime is that particular subset of deviance or failure to conform to rules where the rules in question are legal codes” (Bruce & Yearley, 2006, p. 54). Obviously, a criminal is the agent of the crimes. Following this definition, we will try to define crime and criminal in the way that they are presented in the film. First of all, in the beginning of the movie we see that there has been no crime in Gotham City for the last eight years. Turning back to our definition, it means that legal codes were perfectly obeyed to for the all those years.

We claim that, in the film, crime is defined through the capitalist system, implying that anything that threatens or disturbs the system is a crime. We see that in the film there is no emphasis on the legal codes which means that they may fall insufficient on times and that is why crime is not dependent on them. For instance, Batman is a criminal; this is especially emphasized in the third film. This is important because what he does is actually not against legal codes, he is after criminals just like the Gotham Police Department; however, he does not join them and works independently; even though we will be identifying him with the capitalist system in this presentation, at this point his position is a good example for explaining crime in the film. He is a potential criminal because of his independent actions, because he is not a member of the structured defence mechanisms, he could anytime pose a threat to the order as he is not controllable. Though we need to add that in the last film he is declared a criminal because of a crime he did not commit, so the situation is a little twisted.

So, we started by stating that there has been no crimes in Gotham City for the last eight years, we see that Batman /Bruce has been living some kind of an ascetic life since then both as Batman and as Bruce. His valet, Alfred Pennyworth, has been taking care of him and his business which is run by Lucius Fox. If we briefly tell about Bruce for those who are not familiar with the film, he was orphaned when he was a child, he is the inheritor of a great fortune, a manor, and the Wayne Enterprises. He is a businessman whose hidden identity is the Batman. With the help of Lucius Fox he creates technologies that help him to be Batman which are originally designed for the US military; Wayne Enterprises have several branches such as foods, medicine and entertainment.

Miranda Tate is introduced to the audience in third film. She is a businesswoman and is interested in the fusion reactor that Wayne Enterprises is developing. Later in the film she is in the board of Wayne Enterprises in order to help Bruce Wayne as he has lost his fortune as well as his place in the board of the enterprise. Her true identity is revealed later in the film, which we will be analyzing in detail.

Bane is the super villain of the third film, and according to our analysis, he is identified with communism/socialism. Looking at Bane, we see that what this character presents is in a way a continuation of the political stance offered in the second film, *The Dark Knight*, where the Joker was the main villain. The Joker was explicitly identified with anarchy, first by his actions and then by his discourse. His deeds were based upon lawlessness and disorder. In various scenes of the film we hear him talking about anarchy, especially in one scene he talks about “introducing a little anarchy”. If we quote the character's own sentences, “nobody panics when things go according to plan. Even if the plan is horrifying. If tomorrow I tell the press that like ah, gang banger will get shot or a truck load of soldiers will be blown up. Nobody panics. Because it is all part of the plan. But when I say that one little old mayor will die. Well then everyone loses their minds!” We see that he is emphasizing the importance given to specific individuals and the insignificance and expandability of some others, whereas this would not be a harmful statement for the rest of the humanity, the character is portrayed evil rather than a humanist. His way of “protesting” the order is terroristic and his only aim is to cause harm for the sake of his entertainment. So we see that what is a threat for the individuals who are important for the running of the system is represented as evil in order to reinforce the malignancy of other ideologies.

If we turn to Bane, the actions and ideals of the character are, according to our analysis, identified and offered as the bearers of the communist ideology. This time, by showing that the results of this ideology and these actions are actually evil, the communist ideology is negated just like the Joker example of anarchism.

3. Concepts: The good and the bad of the system

One of our arguments is that the film creates a good and a bad within the capitalist system which it supports ideologically. A point to consider is that all through the third film the positions of the characters are deferred. At the last part of the movie we get an actual grasp of the qualities of the characters and understand who is good and who is evil. So far, we have been explaining how these categories are defined; now we will be showing how these categories are filled with the characters.

Bruce Wayne, the wealthy businessman, is the “good” capitalist of the film. He is a billionaire entrepreneur who has everything, and he does regular charity works, showing us that capitalists and thus capitalism is not innately evil, as those who hold the capital also do good things with their money. The hidden identity of Bruce Wayne is also reinforcing this image by showing that a capitalist can also have a sense of justice which is in an extreme condition in the example of the Batman/ Wayne. Batman's ostracization by the state masses with the minds of the audience because the bad is something or someone against the current order, and even though Batman is not against this order, he is approached like a criminal which creates an atmosphere as if bad, good or crime are not based on the well-being of the dominant ideology and its tools.

A detail that strengthens the good capitalist image is Alfred Pennyworth, he is portrayed as a good, just and occasionally sarcastic man and we see that he has been serving Bruce Wayne for years being always by his side and being contempt with his own position. This is another example of how capitalists can be philanthropic. Despite the fact that Wayne is the master of the relationship, the two have almost always portrayed as equals when it comes to the value given to people which is made visible by Alfred's loyalty and complacency. In this way, the gap between the classes are tried to be narrowed in the film.

Eventually we see that the capitalist system is not bad on the contrary it enables people to do good and profitable works for others. Furthermore, this system is as good as it can be as in the beginning of the film we see that Gotham City is a crimeless place, meaning that the system can also support such conditions. So the good in the film is the capitalist good and bad is, as mentioned above, anything or anyone who is a threat for this ideology.

3.1 Giving the sovereignty to the people

The aim that Bane constantly puts into words is giving the sovereignty to the people. He frequently emphasizes the need for justice. His attempt at hacking the stock market is an action taken in order to collapse the

system and its order. Bane manages to declare people's sovereignty by taking hold of the fusion reactor which could have been used as a power source but turned into a bomb by himself and his master. When he declares the revolution and gives the sovereignty to the people, one of the first things we see is that he liberates the prisoners. After that all we see is pillage, the people who hold the sovereignty are pillaging the city and other people's houses. Ones who want the sovereignty of people are portrayed as criminals, homeless' and thieves so that we get this message; if there will be a revolution, we can lost everything we have, our comfortable homes and lives. If the current order/system collapses, then we cannot recover, our well-being is dependent on the system's well-being. The audience who are affluent enough to go to a movie get the message that they do not need a revolution, in the film those who have a job and a house, a relatively comfortable life do not join the revolution/ the pillage; on the other hand we see that they are taken apart from their belongings by the pillagers, in a way they are tortured. What they are going through is a torture for those who do not need a revolution.

When the people/the pillagers gain control, they form courts and proceed trials, they judge those, who they believe did not act fairly towards them when they were in power in the capitalist system. If the person is found guilty (in the film we do not see the example of not guilty), they ask him/her "exile or death?" Which resembles the slogan "liberty or death", it is another identification with other revolutions. The question creates an illusion because it sounds like it is offering two options one of which is not death. In a later scene we learn that the exile option is also equivalent to death but in a different way, those who choose exile have to crawl over ice in a long distance to reach a safe place which is equal to impossible. So, the people who rules are portrayed as ruthless pillagers who bring chaos, pain and death.

3.1.1 The unsustainable system

Sustainability is a word used by Miranda Tate in the film. In the beginning of the film Miranda is introduced as an activist businesswoman who supports the idea of ecological well-being and this is why she does not believe in the sustainability of the current system, we see that the ecological problems and the system are in a way intermingled together and Miranda's statement about the system's sustainability can be read as both politically and environmentally. At first Miranda cooperates with Wayne who we know is actually the good, thus Miranda is also good for the audience, this is where the true identity of Miranda Tate is deferred. She talks about sustainability and the problems of the current system but up until her true identity is revealed towards the end of the film, we do not really understand what she actually means. In reality, Miranda is the power, the master and the lover behind Bane against whom Wayne/Batman fights and who turns the order, "our order" and our comfortable lives up-side down by claiming to give the sovereignty to the people. What Miranda planned and covertly meant since he beginning of the story is that the capitalist system is unsustainable and thus should be eliminated. She has been posing as an ecologically sensitive businesswoman who is interested in alternative energy sources to hide her true identity and her ultimate goal. In the end we learn that her real name is Talia al Ghul.

In conclusion, we argue that how the story in the film(s) are represented are reflecting the reality of the world that we are living in today. In the contemporary world, crime and criminal are defined through capitalism. That is to say that, those who are against the dominant ideology and pose a threat to the continuity of the existing system are the criminals. There exists a mechanism which designates how good and bad are shaped and there are various media that sustain this mechanism, one of which is entertainment and more specifically cinema.

As indicated in our study, good, bad, crime and similar concepts are not represented to us in a linear logic with visible elements. On the contrary, throughout the film the meanings of the dialogues and the positions of the characters are deferred.

The modern myth that we touched upon at the beginning is the myth of capitalism which the protector of our lives as presented in the film. The myth is the capitalist ideology itself and returning to Eagleton's definition to ideology as the legitimization of dominant powers' values and imaginary resolutions, the film shows us how the dominant powers' values are legitimized and imaginary solutions are created and offered by the utilization of film industry.

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